

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 SAM-01 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01 AEC-11

AID-20 CEA-02 CIEP-02 FEA-02 FPC-01 INT-08 OMB-01

SCI-06 STR-08 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 DRC-01 IO-14 /199 W

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R 251831Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8228

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 02451

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: GENERAL ELECTION: CONSERVATIVES BUFFETED;

LIBERALS BOOMING

REF: LONDON 2383

1. SUMMARY: THE CONSERVATIVES ARE FINDING THE LAST TEN
YARDS TO THE GOAL LINE A MINEFIELD. STATISTICS -- ON
PAY, PRICES, AND TRADE -- ARE CAUSING THEM ACUTE
EMBARRASSMENT, AND ENOCH POWELL, "THE HAND THAT HELD
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THE DAGGER," HAS STRUCK AT LAST -- URGING A VOTE FOR
LABOR AS BRITAIN'S LAST HOPE OF GETTING OUT OF THE EC.

THE OPINION POLLS SHOW THE CONSERVATIVES RETAINING
THEIR LEAD OVER LABOR, BUT WITH THE LIBERALS SURGING
TO THE POINT WHERE IT BECOMES INCREASINGLY PROBLEMATIC
THAT ANY PARTY WILL GAIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY ON
THURSDAY. END SUMMARY

2. THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE HAD TO ENDURE A SERIES OF
HARD KNOCKS OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS. THE TROUBLE BEGAN
ON THURSDAY (FEBRUARY 21) WHEN MATHEMATICAL GREMLINS
ON THE PAY BOARD DISCOVERED THAT BY USING A DIFFERENT
SET OF FACTORS IN COMPUTING WAGES, IT COULD BE
DEMONSTRATED THAT THE MINERS WERE RELATIVELY LESS WELL
PAID THAN WAS ORIGINALLY BELIEVED (REFTEL). THE
LABOR AND LIBERAL PARTIES NATURALLY SEIZED ON THIS
REVELATION TO ARGUE THAT THE MINERS' ORIGINAL WAGE
CLAIM HAD BEEN JUSTIFIED AFTER ALL AND THAT THE
GOVERNMENT'S SHOWDOWN WITH THE MINERS, THE STRIKE, THE
THREE-DAY WEEK, AND THE GENERAL ELECTION ITSELF HAD
ALL BEEN UNNECESSARY.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER VALIANTLY ARGUED BACK THAT FOR
OVER TWENTY YEARS BOTH THE MINERS AND THE COAL BOARD,
UNDER CONSERVATIVE AND LABOR GOVERNMENTS ALIKE, HAD
ACCEPTED CERTAIN FACTORS AS THE BASIS FOR NEGOTIATING
WAGE CLAIMS. WHAT THE PAY BOARD HAD DONE, IN EFFECT,
WAS SIMPLY POINT OUT THAT OTHER WORKERS BASED THEIR
CLAIMS ON A DIFFERENT SET OF FACTORS. IF THE MINERS
NOW WISHED TO CHANGE THE BASIS ON WHICH THEY PRESSED
THEIR OWN CLAIM, THEY WERE FREE TO DO SO. THE GOVERN-
MENT HAD NOT MADE AN ERROR AND SHOULD IN FACT BE THANKED
FOR GOING SO DEEPLY INTO THE WHOLE QUESTION OF PAY
COMPARABILITY.

4. THE PRIME MINISTER MAY HAVE HAD A VALID ARGUMENT,
BUT IN THE HEAT OF AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN THE OPPOSITION
FOUND IT ALL TOO EASY TO SCORE POINTS. HAROLD WILSON
TOLD A BIRMINGHAM RALLY ON SATURDAY THAT NEVER IN THE
HISTORY OF ARITHMETIC HAD SO STUPID A MISCALCULATION
DONE SO MUCH DAMAGE TO SO MANY PEOPLE.

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5. BEFORE HEATH HAD TIME TO RECOVER PROPERLY FROM THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE PAY BOARD'S CALCULATIONS, HIS ERST-WHILE COLLEAGUE, ENOCH POWELL, DELIVERED THE LONG-AWAITED STAB-IN-THE-BACK. ADDRESSING AN ANTI-EC RALLY ON SATURDAY, POWELL URGED THE BRITISH PEOPLE TO TREAT THE QUESTION OF EC MEMBERSHIP AS THE PARAMOUNT ISSUE IN THIS ELECTION, AND IN EFFECT TO VOTE LABOR AS THEIR LAST CHANCE OF GETTING BRITAIN OUT. TONIGHT, POWELL IS EXPECTED TO REPEAT THIS APPEAL IN HIS SECOND AND FINAL CAMPAIGN APPEARANCE.

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6. THE FINAL JOLT FOR THE GOVERNMENT CAME TODAY (FEB'25) WITH THE RELEASE OF THE TRADE FIGURES FOR JANUARY. THEY

SHOWED AN UNPRECEDENTED DEFICIT OF 383 MILLION POUNDS, MORE THAN TWELVE TIMES THE DEFICIT FOR MAY 1970, DISCLOSURE OF WHICH TWO DAYS BEFORE THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION WAS USED WITH EFFECT BY THE CONSERVATIVES TO HELP UNSEAT A LABOR GOVERNMENT.

7. COMMENT: IN THE CURRENT, UNSETTLED MOOD OF THE BRITISH ELECTORATE, IT IS DIFFICULT TO GAUGE WHAT EFFECT ANY OR ALL OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS MAY HAVE ON THE ELECTION OUTCOME, BUT THE CONSERVATIVES CAN TAKE SMALL COMFORT FROM THE OPINION POLLS. ALL OF THEM TESTIFY TO A DIS-QUIETING LIBERAL UPSURGE AND THE LATEST (MARPLAN), TAKEN FEBRUARY 22-23, SHOWED THE CONSERVATIVES (AT 38.5) HOLDING A SOLID 7-POINT LEAD OVER LABOR (31.5), AND THE LIBERALS UP TO A STAGGERING 28 PERCENT. THIS IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL SCORED BY THE LIBERALS THUS FAR IN THE CAMPAIGN IN ANY OF THE NATIONAL POLLS. (GALLUP, IN CONTRAST, A FEW DAYS EARLIER GAVE THEM ONLY 16.5 PERCENT AND THE CONSERVATIVES 42 PERCENT.) IF THE CONSERVATIVES' VOTE DOES IN FACT SINK TO BELOW 40 PERCENT, IT WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY DOUBTFUL WHETHER THIS WILL YIELD THE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY THEY NEED, MUCH LESS THE INCREASED MAJORITY THEY ARE SEEKING.

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